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## CREDITS

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BOMB ON BOARD: The Mystery of CP Flight 21

Video duration – 18:46

The mysterious crash of CP Flight 21 five decades ago remains one of the largest unsolved mass murders in Canadian history. The commercial flight took off from Vancouver, bound for Whitehorse on July 8, 1965, when it exploded in mid-air over the B.C interior. All 52 people on board were killed. Weather was ruled out as a factor. The investigation quickly determined it was a criminal act and that a bomb had been planted in the airplane’s rear lavatory. The RCMP identified four persons of interest, but were never able to determine who was responsible. As a result, no charges were ever laid and the case was closed. In 2018, CBC News journalists began their own investigation, combing through evidence and interviewing dozens of people connected to the crash. Specialists in various fields were brought in to review the evidence. Here is what we learned.

Related Content on curio.ca
• Keeping Canada Safe
• News in Review, May 2005 – Bitter End: The Air India Trial Verdict
VIDEO REVIEW
BEFORE VIEWING

If 51 Canadians were murdered in a single, violent event, how do you think history would reflect what happened? Would you expect the incident to figure prominently in a Canadian history book? Would it surprise you if information on the murder of 51 people would be relatively difficult to find?

WHILE VIEWING

1. What brought down CP Flight 21 on July 8, 1965?
   - a) Mechanical failure
   - b) A bomb
   - c) A hand gun
   - d) Human error

2. How old was Didi Henderson when her father was killed on board CP Flight 21?
   - a) 5
   - b) 10
   - c) 15
   - d) 30

3. Airport security in the 1960s was:
   - a) As vigorous as it is today.
   - b) Tight but not as tight as today.
   - c) Lax but they had X-rays and pat-downs in some cases.
   - d) Virtually non-existent.
4. After CP Flight 21 was brought down, the RCMP came up with one suspect that they held responsible for bombing the plane.  
   ❑ TRUE or ❑ FALSE

5. Police believe that either gun powder or dynamite was detonated at the rear of the plane.  
   ❑ TRUE or ❑ FALSE

6. Who did Cy Leyland, Transport Canada’s lead investigator looking into the crash, believe brought down the plane?
   ❑ a) Stefan Koleszar   ❑ b) Douglas Edgar   ❑ c) Paul Vander Meulen   ❑ d) Peter Broughton

7. In 1965:
   ❑ a) It was very easy to get gunpowder and dynamite.
   ❑ b) It was difficult to get gunpowder and dynamite.
   ❑ c) Only law enforcement and the military had access to gunpowder and dynamite.
   ❑ d) People could easily get gunpowder and dynamite — provided they passed a criminal background check.
TALK PROMPTS

NEW
TALK PROMPT #1

Consider pausing the video and giving students the opportunity to talk to an elbow partner for a few minutes or use these questions as part of a class discussion.

Pause the video after Didi Henderson says, “I for one will never forget this because I lost a dear loved one in it — and so many other families, too” @ 03:19

1. How does the fact that someone intentionally downed CP Flight 21 change the way people view the tragedy?

2. How frustrating do you think it was for the families of the victims to know that no one has been identified as the perpetrator of what is considered the worst mass murder on Canadian soil in the last 75 years?
TALK PROMPT #2

Pause the video after Larry Vance says, “Now when you get into a criminal investigation, you get into the whodunit” @ 07:13

1. Does it surprise you that there was virtually no security screening for airplanes in the 1960s?
2. Why do you think security was not a priority?
3. What did Carmen Kim discover in the RCMP documents she acquired under her Freedom of Information request?
Pause the video after criminologist Mike Arntfield says, “There’s a saying in forensics and in explosives investigations that the design of a bomb is limited only by the imagination of the bomber” at 09:58

1. What does Arntfield mean by this?
2. How could investigators use this premise to find the person who brought down CP Flight 21?
3. Who did Cy Leyland believe was responsible for the bombing? Why?
Pause the video after Mike Arntfield says, “I am prepared to eliminate him entirely.” @ 15:22

1. What did CBC investigators discover in their explosives testing with Billy Smith?

2. Why does Mike Arntfield think that Stefan Koleszar is too far off statistically to be the man who brought down the plane?

3. What put Douglas Edgar on the suspect list? Why were his actions suspicious?

4. What does Edgar’s daughter think of the RCMP casting suspicion on her father?

5. In the end, what does Mike Arntfield think of the likelihood of Edgar being the bomber?
TALK PROMPT #5

Play the video through to the end and consider the following questions as a class –

1. Why were investigators interested in Paul Vander Meulen as a suspect? What did his psychiatrist say about him?
2. Why does Mike Arntfield view Peter Broughton as his top suspect? How did Broughton’s sister, Joan Hodgins, react to the idea that her brother planted and detonated a bomb on the plane?
3. Will we ever know who really brought down CP Flight 21?
AFTER VIEWING

Conduct a web search of CP Flight 21. List as many websites as you can that have information about the bombing of the aircraft. Does the volume of information dealing with the bombing surprise you? Explain your answer.
This is probably one of the more remarkable cold cases in Canadian history. In part because it is so unusual, and yet there is little to nothing that’s been written on it and very few people know about it. And as a cold case that lends itself to modern cold case methodologies, [it’s] a real watershed case.

– Mike Arntfield, Criminologist, University of Western Ontario
THE STORY

It was not unusual to see a plane overhead at that time of day. People living in the town of 100 Mile House, B.C. were used to the Thursday afternoon Canadian Pacific flight from Vancouver to Whitehorse. The plane, holding steady at an altitude of 15,000 feet, was headed for a scheduled stop in Prince George. What was unusual was what happened next: an explosion at the rear of the plane, objects flying out of the back of the fuselage as it nosedived to earth, the tail of the plane continuing forward for half a kilometer in a violent arc away from the rest of the plane. It was a scene of shocking destruction that turned the usual into the unthinkable, the calm into chaos.

It turns out that the objects a witness saw flying out of the back of the plane after the bomb exploded were actually passengers, many still in their seats, being pulled out of the plane’s cabin.
The crash of CP Flight 21 on July 8, 1965 is still on the books as one of the worst cases of mass murder on Canadian soil. It didn’t take long for investigators to determine that the plane was brought down by a bomb in the rear washroom of the aircraft. The composition of the bomb: probably dynamite and gunpowder. The bomb was planted by one of the passengers and would have been left in plain sight, suggesting the bomber entered the washroom, assembled the bomb and detonated it, perhaps with a timer, killing himself and the other 51 people on board. The bombing was thoroughly investigated by Transport Canada and the RCMP.

Investigators quickly determined that they were dealing with a case of murder. In due time, they were able to narrow the passenger list to four potential suspects:

- Peter Broughton – a loner with an interest in guns and gunpowder
- Douglas Edgar – a gambler who had purchased life
were interviewed and, in the end, the RCMP could not pin the crime on any of them. Eventually the case went cold and the RCMP closed the file. It remains unsolved.

Family members of the victims of the crash commissioned a memorial marking the 50th anniversary of the bombing in 2015. The cairn, located in 100 Mile House, the town closest to the crash site, is topped with a plaque that lists all 52 of the dead.

One of the names on the plaque belongs to the murderer.

TO CONSIDER
1. Why do you think so little is known about the downing of CP Flight 21?
2. Why do you think the RCMP were unable to pin the crime on one of the four suspects?
3. Why would family members have mixed feelings about the plaque that tops the cairn at the memorial in 100 Mile House?
ACTIVITY #1: The Full Story

- Form a group of six (6).
- Go to the CBC Radio website for the show Uncover (www.cbc.ca/radio/uncover) and click on Podcast.
- Each group member will go home and listen to one (1) of the podcasts for Uncover: Bomb on Board (Season 2). The segment titles are:
  a. The crash
  b. The suspects
  c. A fifth man
  d. The bomb
  e. Explosive reports
  f. Full circle

These podcast episodes range from 40 to 60 minutes in length.
- Reassemble as a group the day after listening to the podcast you selected. Each group member will provide a five-minute summary of what happened in the Uncover podcast they listened to.
ACTIVITY #2: Who Brought Down CP Flight 21?

Investigators were never able to figure out who was responsible for bringing down CP Flight 21 on July 8, 1965. However, they were able to narrow their search to four prime suspects.

Review the profile of each suspect on the following pages and complete the chart dealing with motive, means and opportunity.

*Note: The suspects have been listed in alphabetical order.*

Didi Henderson, whose father was killed in the bombing of Canadian Pacific Flight 21 when she was five, is one of many family members and loved ones left with unanswered questions about the crash. She visited the site with The National’s Ian Hanomansing.
### The Loner – Peter Broughton (age 29) of Vancouver, B.C.

#### What makes him a suspect?
Peter Broughton had a passion for guns, ammunition and gunpowder. In fact, police found gunpowder in his room when they visited his home — albeit a different kind of gunpowder than the one used in the bombing. In the six months prior to the bombing of the aircraft, he showed an increased interest in airplane construction. Two nights prior to the bombing, his mother said he warned her that there was “something dangerous” in his room. Described as a loner and someone who struggled to find and maintain intimate relationships, Broughton was thoroughly investigated but never identified as the bomber.

#### What suggests he is not a suspect?
Broughton’s sister Joan Hodgins (who dropped him off at the airport that afternoon) said Peter was in good spirits and had been playing with his niece and nephew prior to boarding CP Flight 21. Hodgins was also with her brother when he packed his bag and didn’t see anything suspicious going into his luggage. Meanwhile, a careful review of RCMP records suggests that suspicion was heightened based on a belief that Broughton was gay, leading to the question: was he targeted on the basis of his sexual orientation? While widely accepted today, homosexuality was considered a crime in 1965.
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<th>Peter Broughton</th>
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<td><strong>Motive</strong> – What reason might the suspect have for committing the crime?</td>
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<td><strong>Opportunity</strong> – Did the suspect have the chance to commit the crime?</td>
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The Gambler – Douglas Edgar (age 40) of Surrey, B.C.

What makes him a suspect?
Douglas Edgar made his living working in remote logging and fishing camps. He was also an avid, and somewhat successful, gambler. He told his wife he was heading to Prince George to work at a local mill, but when the RCMP looked into this assertion in the aftermath of the bombing, they couldn’t find a company that was expecting him to show up for work. Edgar also aroused suspicion because he bought $125 000 worth of life insurance (the equivalent of $1 million in today’s currency) prior to boarding the plane. He was also traveling with “next to no clothing.”

What suggests he is not a suspect?
Edgar was described by his associates as a “fair gambler” who showed “little emotion whether he won or lost.” His gambling history suggests an impulsive nature which may explain why he bought insurance immediately prior to boarding the plane. One would think that someone planning a mass murder would be more calculated — taking out insurance well in advance of the flight — and making sure he covered his tracks. Instead, Edgar went to a kiosk with his young daughter at his side, purchased the insurance from an agent, and hopped on the plane. Police also came to two critical conclusions: first, he had no experience with explosives and, second, he was not in any kind of significant financial trouble (something that would explain the big insurance purchase).
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<th><strong>Douglas Edgar</strong></th>
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The Explosives Expert – Stefan Koleszar (age 53) of Vancouver, B.C.

**What makes him a suspect?**
Police were drawn to Stefan Koleszar “because of his knowledge of explosives and history of violence.” Koleszar, described as an expert “powder man” by his rock-excavating co-workers, was hired to conduct a blasting job for a company near Prince George. He was described by his bosses as hot-tempered. When the RCMP ran a background check on Koleszar they discovered that he was charged with murder after an altercation with another man. This was years before the bombing and the charges were later downgraded to manslaughter. When the case went to trial, Koleszar was acquitted.

**What suggests he is not a suspect?**
Police confirmed where Koleszar was heading and that the company that hired him paid for his plane ticket. After the bombing, they X-rayed his body looking for fragments that might suggest he was the bomber. They found nothing of consequence. The police also felt that Koleszar — a 53-year-old man with a steady job, five children and a family life — didn’t fit the profile of someone who would bomb a plane.
### Stefan Koleszar

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The Man with the Gun – Paul Vander Meulen (age 35) of Richmond, B.C.

What makes him a suspect?

Paul Vander Meulen was considered a suspect for two reasons: a large life insurance policy and his state of mind. An entrepreneur who had recently become a business partner in a mining company, Vander Meulen was heading to the B.C. interior to do some prospecting. Based on the dangerous nature of the work, he took out a large life insurance policy two months prior to boarding CP Flight 21. The policy, valued at $100 000 ($800 000 in today’s money), required a large premium because he had suffered a head injury while working on a boat several years prior. Police were also curious about Vander Meulen’s state of mind after accessing his psychiatric records. In 1964, Vander Meulen went to see a psychiatrist who deemed him unfit to return to work, saying he possessed a “deep madness toward the world” and identified him as someone who was “capable of violent, irrational acts.” Vander Meulen also carried a registered .44 magnum revolver onto the plane with him on July 8, 1965. Finally, when the RCMP X-rayed his body they found copper fragments in him — something that was foreign to the plane and consistent with blasting caps.
The Man with the Gun – Paul Vander Meulen (age 35) of Richmond, B.C.

What suggests he is not a suspect?
Vander Meulen carried a large sum of money — $800 — onto the plane that day. Police wondered why someone heading into a murder-suicide situation would decide to bring money with them if they didn’t have plans for after they landed. Of note: the money was never recovered at the site of the crash. They also recovered his .44 revolver and some ammunition but can’t confirm whether Vander Meulen stored the gun in his luggage or had it on his person. Finally, a few anecdotal notes by a psychiatrist — however compelling — does not prove that Vander Meulen was a mass murderer.
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CONCLUSION

Which suspect do you think is responsible for bringing down CP Flight 21? Support your conclusions with evidence.

Sarah Taylor, Paul Vander Meulen’s great-granddaughter, told CBC investigators about a family discussion where Vander Meulen’s former wife spoke about the bombing and said her husband was responsible for bringing down the plane. This observation was dismissed by most of the family members with whom she shared her thoughts.
SOURCES


